

Confirmation

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit; for it had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ~ Acts 8:14-17

THE DESCENT of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus (see Mt 3:13-17; Jn 1:32-34) was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies saying that the “*Spirit of the Lord*” would be upon the awaited Messiah (Is 11:2; Is 61:1; Lk 4:16-21). Jesus promised that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit would also fall upon all those who believed in him after he was glorified (see Jn 7:37-39) — a promise that was first fulfilled on Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4). Soon after Pentecost, the apostles began to lay hands on those who had been baptized so that they might also receive the Holy Spirit (see Acts 8:14-17). This practice was later referred to as “Confirmation.”

Grace of Confirmation

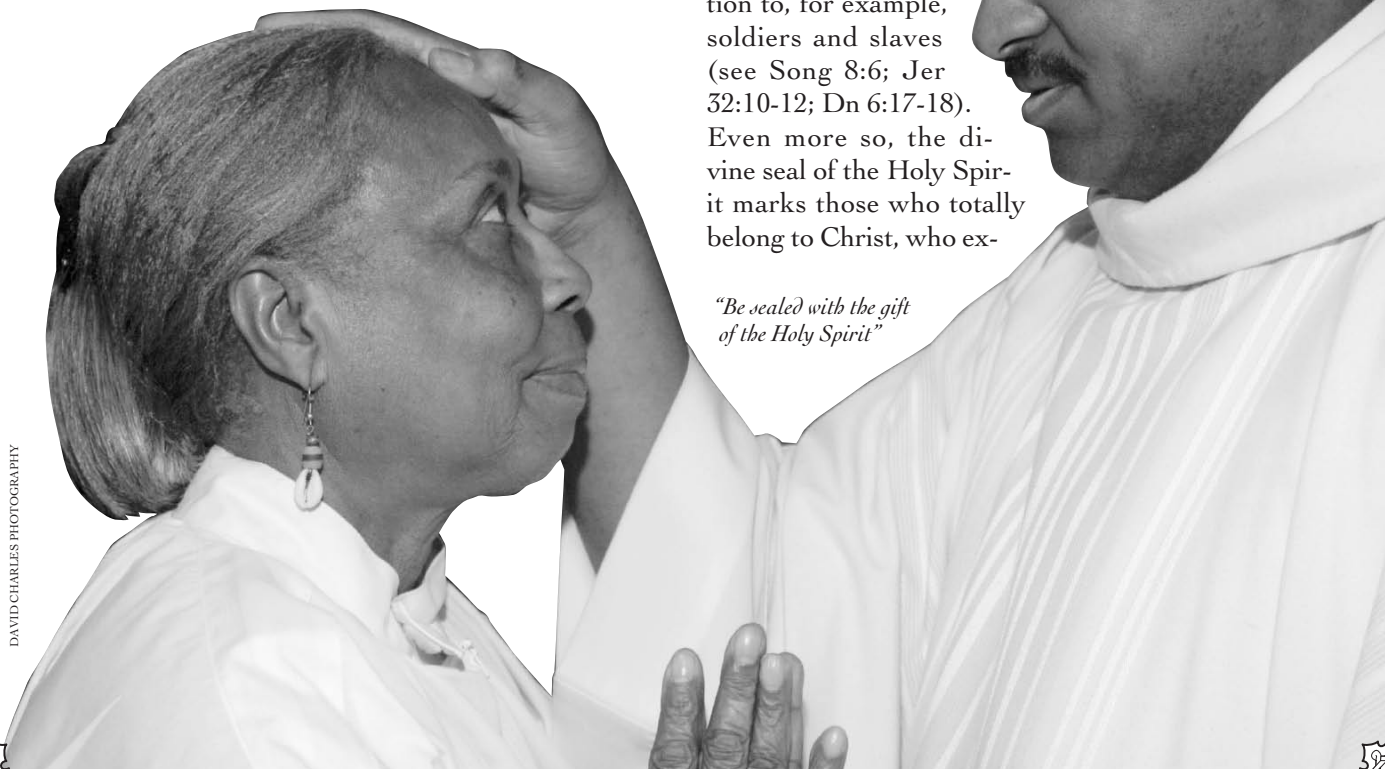
Confirmation, which “confirms” faith, is necessary to complete the baptismal grace, the gift of divine life

“The effect of Confirmation is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”

that God intends for every human person. Specifically, the effect of Confirmation is a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This special outpouring of the Holy Spirit imparts an indelible spiritual mark (character). In other words, the effect of Confirmation, like Baptism, can never be erased from

one’s soul. The newly confirmed are forever sealed with the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Confirmation may never be repeated. In the Old Testament, a seal marked the property of another, exercised their authority, and assured their protection to, for example, soldiers and slaves (see Song 8:6; Jer 32:10-12; Dn 6:17-18). Even more so, the divine seal of the Holy Spirit marks those who totally belong to Christ, who ex-

“Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit”



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ercise the authority of Christ, and are promised his divine protection (see 2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13; Eph 4:30).

This special outpouring of the Holy Spirit not only completes the baptismal grace but also brings about a closer union with Christ. Through this deeper union, those confirmed share more perfectly in God's life as his children and are more perfectly united with the entire family of God, the Church. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are increased in Confirmation and through them we receive the power to "be not afraid" so that we can spread and defend the Christian faith (see Mt 28:19; Acts 18:9; Heb 13:6).

Requirements of Confirmation

Every person who has been baptized can and should be confirmed in order to effect a completion of baptismal grace. Ideally, adults receive the three sacraments of initiation — Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist — at the same celebration. In the case of a baptized infant, Confirmation may be received by a child when he or she reaches the age of discretion or when there is a danger of death.

To receive Confirmation, the candidate must profess his or her faith, be in a state of grace (free from mortal sin), and intend to receive the sacrament. Candidates must be prepared to be Christian disciples and to witness every moment of their lives so that they might say, *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"*

(Gal 2:20). Each candidate must also have a sponsor (someone who will assist him or her in living the Christian life). Because of the unity of Baptism and Confirmation, the sponsor is usually one of the baptismal godparents.

The ordinary minister of Confirmation is the bishop, who is a direct successor of the Twelve. The bishop, whose priesthood can be traced back to the apostles, most clearly manifests in his office what this sacrament effects, namely to draw the baptized into a closer union with the Church and her apostolic beginnings. A priest might also confirm, and ordinarily does so on the night of the Easter Vigil, as well as at other times when an unbaptized person enters the Catholic Church or a baptized person is brought into full communion. A priest may also confirm a Catholic seeking to complete his or her initiation, provided that the priest has been given the authority to do so by the bishop or when there is a danger of death. Even when a priest does confirm, the ministry of the bishop is made present in the use of the chrism which has been consecrated by the bishop. (The bishop consecrates all the oils to be used throughout his diocese at the Chrism Mass during Holy Week.)

The Rite of Confirmation

When Confirmation is celebrated at a different time than Baptism (in the case of infant Baptism, for example) the Rite begins with a renewal of baptismal vows to show its connection to Baptism. When



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Confirmation celebrated in Iraq by Archbishop Edwin O'Brien of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA

“The gifts of the Holy Spirit are increased in Confirmation and through them we receive the power to ‘be not afraid’ so that we can spread and defend the Christian faith.”

Confirmation is celebrated at the Easter Vigil, it immediately follows Baptism, beginning when the bishop or priest invites the faithful to pray saying, “My dear friends, let us pray to God our Father, that he will pour out the Holy Spirit on these candidates for Confirmation to strengthen them with his gifts and to anoint them to be more like Christ, the Son of God” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* 233).

After this invitation, the bishop or priest then stretches out his hands (a gesture that symbolizes the Holy Spirit) over the candidates and specifically prays for the seven traditional gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence, and fear of the Lord (see Is 11:2).

Next, the priest or bishop anoints each of the candidates with chrism and the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads, while he recites the formula, “Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit” (*Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* 234). In Eastern Churches, the candidate’s eyes, nose, ears, lips, chest, back, hands, and feet are also anointed. This anointing and formula constitute the essential rite of Confirmation.

The chrism that is used is most completely understood in light of Scripture. Oil is a sign of abundance and joy and is used to cleanse, limber, heal, and soothe (see Ps 23:5; Ps 104:15; Is 1:6; Lk 10:34). Just as oil gives beauty, health, and strength to the body, so too does the Holy Spirit give these to the soul. The pleasant odor of the chrism symbolizes the fact that those confirmed are “*the aroma of Christ*” (2 Cor 2:15) through whom God “*spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of [Christ] everywhere*” (2 Cor 2:14).

The Power of the Spirit

Familiarity with the actions, gifts, and promptings of Holy Spirit is part of the necessary preparation for Confirmation and is essential to living as a Christian, a child of God (see Gal 4:5-7). The Holy Spirit is the one who reveals God to us. He inspires Scripture and Tradition, guides and protects the Church, and unites the Church both in heaven and on earth, especially in the celebration of the sacraments (see Eph 4:4-5). The Holy Spirit is responsible for the Church’s mission on earth.

Every baptized person has the responsibility to live as a child of God — a task in which the Holy

Spirit constantly gives help through the virtues and gifts infused at Baptism. The gifts of the Holy Spirit, permanent dispositions that make the Christian responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, are increased in Confirmation. Just as “*each tree is known by its own fruit*” (Lk 6:44), so too, is the life of every Christian. Among the fruits of the Holy Spirit are “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control*” (Gal 5:22-23). (Based on the Latin Vulgate translation, three more are traditionally included in the list: generosity, modesty, and chastity.) These fruits, which are the first fruits of eternal glory, make it possible to recognize more clearly the presence of the Holy Spirit and are a sign of becoming a true disciple of Jesus (see Jn 15:8, 16).

The Holy Spirit is with us every minute of the day and can guide our actions through his promptings. They are experienced in many different ways, such as a small inner voice, dreams, the words of Scripture, conversations with others, testimonies, prayer, and a sense of knowing the right thing to do. In these ways, the Holy Spirit shows each of us how to live as a child of God. The Holy Spirit reveals sin to bring about repentance and conversion (see Acts 2:37-38), inspires us in what to say in a particular situation (see Mt 10:17-20), and “*helps us in our weakness ... [and] intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words*” (Rom 8:26). In whatever way these promptings are experienced, they assist us in hearing and following the Holy Spirit.

Finally, “*my Spirit abides among you; fear not*” (Hg 2:5). Through Confirmation, our baptismal priesthood — the common priesthood of the faithful — is perfected and we receive the power to “be not afraid” so that we can spread and defend our Christian faith (see Mt 28:19-20; Acts 18:9; Heb 13:6). We have the privilege and responsibility to live more completely as sons and daughters of God, and as his ambassadors to invite others to do the same. Strengthened by the great gifts bestowed — not because of our own merit nor because of the attainment of a specific age or maturity but by the graciousness of God alone — by the sacrament of Confirmation, the Christian may even be required to give the supreme witness of martyrdom.

(CCC 735-736, 1285-1314, 1533, 1830-1832)